

# Gorbachev Uses Lithuania To Send Soviets a Message

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MOSCOW, April 14—A veteran of political stagecraft, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev is directing his campaign of pressure against Lithuania not only as a battle for power against a single republic, but also as a rehearsal of what the Kremlin is prepared to do to stop independence movements elsewhere in the Soviet Union.

Although Gorbachev would certainly prefer that Lithuania's 3.7 million people remain a part of the Soviet Union, his greater concern is preventing others among the 15 Soviet republics from bolting as well.

Gorbachev has heard the fore-

casts here and abroad that the Kremlin may soon find itself presiding over little more than the Russian Republic and perhaps the

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Central Asian republics, the union's poorest region. He is seeking to prevent such a dissolution of Moscow's remaining empire.

Lithuania, in all likelihood, is already gone. Even if the republic's leadership is brought to heel by Friday's threat of an economic blockade or some future sanctions, at least three-quarters of the population there favors outright independence—a sufficiently large proportion to satisfy Gorbachev's demand for a referendum on secession.

See LITHUANIA, A29, Col. 1

# Embargo Threat Condemned by Senate Leader

Senate Majority Leader George J. Mitchell (D-Maine), returning with several other senators from Moscow, yesterday condemned Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's threat to cut off needed supplies to Lithuania if that republic does not rescind its independence moves.

Mitchell said Gorbachev reaffirmed his intention to resolve the Lithuanian crisis by nonviolent means during a meeting with the U.S. legislators that was held before the threat of economic sanctions was issued. But Mitchell, speaking with reporters at Andrews Air Force Base, said, "An act need not involve direct violence to be wrong."

"The action taken yesterday was wrong," he said. "We condemn it. . . . The Soviet Union is obviously trying to intimidate and coerce the Lithuanian people. Such tactics are unwise and inappropriate. The issuance of an ultimatum of this kind represents an escalation and is precisely the wrong approach in such a delicate and dangerous situation."

Gorbachev has given Lithuania until Sunday to annul legislation bolstering the republic's declaration of independence or face a cutoff of such key products as petroleum and natural gas, which Moscow says it could export to other countries for hard currency.

Lithuania's president, Vytautas Landsbergis, has reacted to the ultimatum with his customary blend of serenity and defiance. He said Lithuania had enough oil reserves to last "for some time," and he has continued to implore the West for moral, if not financial, support.

Independence, the Lithuanian leader asserted, is a given, be it now or in a few years, and he has made clear he has no intention of changing his mind by Sunday. Besides, Landsbergis said, "It's Easter." In predominantly Roman Catholic Lithuania, holiday observances are to continue through Monday and, Landsbergis said, it will be Tuesday before Gorbachev's ultimatum may be discussed by the legislature.

Today, Lithuania's leaders drafted a brief, defiant response saying: "Unfortunately, Mr. Gorbachev, your telegram came in the midst of the Easter holiday and we cannot answer you. Before we do so, please explain specifically what supplies you intend to cut from our republic." The leaders delayed sending the telegram until it can be approved by the legislature after its holiday recess.

Gorbachev—not the international showman known in the West, but the tough politician of Soviet reality—sees doom and tragedy when he thinks of the independence campaigns in the three Baltic states—Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia—as well as in the Caucasus and the Ukraine.

As he said this week, he is convinced that secession movements will lead inevitably to "such a civil war, such a bloody slaughter, that we will not emerge from it all together." On this subject, the Soviet leader told a group of Senate Democrats Thursday, he will not accept any "lectures" from the West.

In his desire to make Lithuania an example of his determination to hold the union together, Gorbachev appears willing even to take risks with



one of his most significant achievements since taking office in March 1985: the fledgling relationships with the United States and the West.

Gorbachev is attempting to play a myriad of difficult, if not impossible, roles: economic rebuilders, historical truth teller, Communist Party reformer, foreign ambassador. But he is drawing a line at allowing whole parts of his country to slip away easily. While he was prepared to look at the "loss" of Eastern Europe last year as a political and historical inevitability, he resists the dissolution of the "internal empire." At the very least, he is trying to buy the union more time.

Gorbachev does appear willing to compromise a bit. If he thought he could emerge from the secession crisis with only Lithuania independent and the rest of the union secure, he would undoubtedly be sat-

isfied, having turned potential disaster into a loss of limited proportions. But further breakup, especially beyond the Baltic states, is intolerable for the Kremlin leader.

For its part, Lithuania intentionally made itself a test case for Gorbachev. In a hurried attempt to declare independence before Gorbachev was elected president or the Soviet legislature could pass a law on secession, the Lithuanian legislature declared independence last month, formed a government and began acting as if the Soviet Union were a foreign state. Its move was at once audacious, naive and, to Moscow, beyond the bounds of even present-day acceptability.

Unsuccessful at heading off a direct challenge to the Kremlin's authority, Gorbachev has since sought to isolate Lithuania, stage by stage and threat by threat. In doing so, he

has tried to make clear to Lithuania and the rest of the country that the process of winning independence will be prolonged and painful and that independence may mean economic disaster and political isolation.

Although leaders of independence movements in Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, the Ukraine, Latvia and Estonia continue to make defiant statements and gestures, they have watched with a certain chill as Gorbachev has tightened the screw on Lithuania, apparently prepared to accept little else but capitulation by Landsbergis's government.

The specter of a possible military invasion remains in the background. While Gorbachev holds this ultimate option in reserve, merely suggesting it with ominous troop movements in Lithuania and takeovers of official buildings, he has proceeded full force with propaganda and with

what are called in the lexicon here "political measures."

Nightly on television, the official news program Vremya echoes state-run newspapers in their daily attempts to portray Lithuanians as cynical "enemies of *perestroika*," Gorbachev's reform program, and as ambitious politicians who would violate civil rights of ethnic Poles and Russians in Lithuania.

Visitors to Lithuania find the people rather calm and, for the most part, hungry for an independent state. Polls show that at least 50 percent of those belonging to ethnic minorities also favor an independent state. But in the national media, the Lithuanians, especially the new legislators, are described as greedy and ignorant of the economic disaster that awaits them. Although the Kremlin has refused to recognize Lithuania as an indepen-

dent state or even discuss the issue, it is threatening to charge hard currency for oil and natural gas—a move that would triple or quadruple energy prices there.

Gorbachev means to paint two contrasting scenarios: one in which Lithuania stays in the country as a part of a "renewed" federation, with subsidized oil and gas and all the other "advantages" of a union; the other in which an independent Lithuania struggles for survival as it confronts debts owed to Moscow, a drop in energy imports and potential loss of territory to the Kremlin or neighboring Byelorussia.

Make the right choice, Gorbachev seems to say. The Lithuanians feel they already have. But Gorbachev, in every gesture and show of strength, is talking not only to Lithuania and the other Baltic states. He wants an entire nation to listen.